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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Seventeenth session
7-25 July 1997

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS SEVENTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Aurora JAVATE DE DIOS

Addendum

IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORT SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

B. Consideration of reports

3. Initial, second and third periodic reports

Antigua and Barbuda

1. The Committee considered the initial, second and third periodic reports of Antigua and Barbuda (CEDAW/C/ANT/1-3) at its 340th, 341st and 348th meetings, on 10 and 16 July 1997.

2. In her introductory statement, the representative of Antigua and Barbuda indicated that Antigua and Barbuda had become party to the Convention on 31 August 1989, at which time the Convention had become fully incorporated in domestic law. She noted that the report before the Committee had been submitted in 1994 and significant developments in implementation had occurred since then. Accordingly, an addendum had been submitted to the Committee to update the report.

3. The representative indicated that the Women's Desk had been upgraded in 1985 to a Directorate of Women's Affairs, which had responsibility for promoting

the social, political and economic interests of women and their development. Pursuant to the Beijing Platform for Action, the Directorate had identified as priority areas of concern the elimination of violence against women, education and training, the eradication of poverty, the encouragement of more women becoming involved in the decision-making process and the expansion of general health and reproductive health programmes mainly targeted at young women. To fulfil international and regional commitments, the Directorate's plans to mainstream gender in all government departments/divisions included a training workshop involving heads of ministries, local government officers, non-governmental organizations and heads of department. It had also revised its national Plan of Action for Gender Affairs. The Directorate had recently organized a forum to publicize the Convention and was planning to introduce courses to encourage women to enter politics and decision-making.

4. The representative noted that several major legal reforms had been introduced or were currently pending or planned. The Sexual Offences Act 1995 and the Maintenance Act were now in force. The family (protection against domestic violence) bill, which would provide for protection orders and orders with regard to the occupation of the matrimonial home, would be debated during 1997 and an equal opportunity act would be introduced in the near future.

5. The representative informed the Committee that sex-role stereotyping remained a problem in Antigua and Barbuda. Within the education system, the need to reduce the stereotyping of roles was accepted. For that reason, both sexes were exposed to similar disciplines and training within the system. However, there was a realization that socialization within the home and wider society also influenced boys and girls to choose traditional skills even when offered a wider range of options. Within the school system, boys were more exposed to technical skills and girls to domestic skills. The Ministries of Education, Health and Labour offered family life education programmes to promote attitudes of equal responsibility of women and men in the care and socialization of children. Domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, battery and rape were prevalent and rarely reported as many men considered such conduct acceptable. The representative noted that a 24-hour domestic violence hotline was scheduled to be introduced in August 1997 by the Directorate, in collaboration with a number of non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

6. The representative informed the Committee that plans now in place to allow pregnant teenagers to continue their education included working with fathers as appropriate and the provision of functional literacy skills programmes, skills training, parenting classes and family life education, which involved family planning and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) education.

7. The representative indicated that although women constituted the majority of voters in Antigua and Barbuda, the political participation of women remained low and strategies and plans of action would be introduced to reverse that.

8. The representative informed the Committee that there was a high rate of perinatal mortality among women in Antigua and Barbuda. She noted that abortion

was illegal in the country, although termination of pregnancy on medical grounds was permitted.

9. The Committee was told that women comprised a significant part of the agricultural population in Antigua and Barbuda. Although they were not subject to direct discrimination, farms operated by women farmers were usually less than half the size of their male counterparts and women farmers very often had multiple responsibilities. The Directorate of Women's Affairs provided training and support to women farmers.

10. The representative indicated that the Divorce Act 1997 now provided irretrievable breakdown as the sole ground for divorce and allowed for divorce to be sought after one year of marriage. In certain circumstances, men could now be convicted of sexual assault against their wives. The representative noted, however, that women in de facto relationships suffered legal disadvantages.

11. The representative reiterated the strong commitment of Antigua and Barbuda to the elimination of discrimination against women, the implementation of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action. She stated that that commitment had been manifested in the preparations for and participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as in the preparations for the presentation of Antigua and Barbuda's report before the Committee.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

12. The Committee welcomed the fact that Antigua and Barbuda had ratified the Convention without reservations. The Committee commended the State party for its report, given that it was a small island State with limited resources. It noted that such States had particular difficulties in the compilation of data and in acquiring personnel with the capacity to work in that area.

13. The Committee also commended the State party on its frank and full presentation and the submission of its addendum, which although presented late in the day, together with the representative's speech, provided a complete picture of the implementation of the Convention in Antigua and Barbuda. The Committee was gratified with the obvious political will in the country with regard to the advancement of women.

14. However, the Committee was disappointed that the report provided no information with regard to the implementation of the Platform for Action and the measures that had been taken by the State party to address the general recommendations of the Committee.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

15. The Committee noted that Antigua and Barbuda, being a small island State, seemed to be handicapped by a lack of financial and human resources in the compilation of statistical data and that might be an obstacle in fully implementing the Convention.

Positive aspects

16. The Committee commended Antigua and Barbuda on the early establishment of the Women's Desk soon after attaining independence, and later its upgrading and expansion to the Directorate of Women's Affairs. The Committee also commended the Government on its intention to upgrade that office further to that of a ministry, when a woman was appointed to elected office.

17. The Committee welcomed the introduction of important legislation, including the Equal Opportunity Act, the Divorce Act and the Sexual Offences Act. It looked forward to the results of the introduction of the equal pay and domestic violence bills and noted with appreciation the use by Antigua and Barbuda of model legislation developed by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

18. The Committee complimented the State party on the successful measures it had taken to reduce the birth rate.

19. The Committee noted with satisfaction the introduction of gender management systems.

20. The Committee applauded the statement by the President with regard to women and decision-making.

21. The Committee commended the introduction of the domestic violence hotline and related support services.

22. The Committee welcomed the introduction of measures to address teenage pregnancies and its focus on the situation of the girl child.

Principal subjects of concern

23. The Committee was concerned that there were few measures to increase the political participation of women. It noted the absence of women in Parliament and the lack of measures to increase women's participation in public life generally.

24. The Committee was concerned about the lack of integrated measures to address violence against women.

25. The Committee noted the lack of decision making power of the Directorate for Women's Affairs, which had not yet been elevated to the level of a ministry.

26. The Committee was concerned about the lack of information in the report on prostitution and trafficking in women.

27. The Committee was also concerned about the continued selection by female students of stereotypical subjects. It was also concerned about the greater exposure of girls within the school system to domestic skills and boys to technical skills.

28. The Committee was concerned about the low level of occupational achievement by educated women and male dominance in technical and professional fields, on

the one hand, and the concentration of women in the lower-paid service sector, in particular the tourist industry, on the other.

29. The Committee noted that women's concerns had not yet been integrated into the national five-year plan.

30. The Committee was concerned about the situation of rural women and their access to credit.

31. The Committee was also concerned about the continued illegality of abortion, as well as the lack of family planning education programmes. It expressed concern that contraceptives were not covered by medical benefits schemes.

32. The Committee was deeply concerned about the high level of teenage pregnancy.

33. The Committee expressed concern about the high rate of perinatal mortality.

34. The Committee noted the lack of special measures for women with HIV/AIDs, as well as the absence of measures to address drug addiction among women. The Committee expressed the hope that more information would be given about the problem in the next report.

35. The Committee expressed concern about the position of women in common law relationships.

Recommendations and suggestions

36. The Committee recommends that the Directorate of Women's Affairs be upgraded to a ministry.

37. The Committee suggests that gender issues be integrated into the five-year plan.

38. The Committee suggests that the State party consider the use of article 4, and commends the State party on its decision to adopt the recommendation of the Meeting of the Commonwealth Ministers for Women's Affairs.

39. The Committee recommends that the State party encourage the participation of women in politics.

40. The Committee suggests that Antigua and Barbuda introduce appropriate sex education and family planning education policies and programmes.

41. The Committee recommends that Antigua and Barbuda ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 100 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value.

42. The Committee recommends the introduction of programmes to encourage men to take account of their family responsibilities.

43. The Committee notes that culture is a positive vehicle to influence the advancement of women. In that regard it suggests that Calypso be used as a vehicle to promote respect for women. The Committee also suggests that the media be used to promote positive attitudes towards women.

44. The Committee requests that wide dissemination be given to the present concluding comments in Antigua and Barbuda so as to make individuals aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure de facto equality for women and the further steps that are required in this regard.